

March 14, 2022

To the Honorable Chairs Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, and members of the Judiciary Committee:

I am writing IN SUPPORT of:

- S.B. No. 387 AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE JUVENILE JUSTICE POLICY AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE
- S.B. No. 392 AN ACT CONCERNING STATEMENTS MADE BY JUVENILES

I am writing IN STRONG OPPOSITION to the following bills:

- S.B. No. 365 AN ACT CONCERNING JUVENILE AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORMS
- S.B. No. 388: AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEFENSE OF A PERSON OR A PERSON'S DWELLING, PLACE OF WORK OR MOTOR VEHICLE
- H.B. No. 5418 AN ACT REVISING JUVENILE AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE STATUTES AND INSURANCE STATUTES CONCERNING THEFT OF A MOTOR VEHICLE
- H.B. No. 5417 AN ACT CONCERNING JUVENILE JUSTICE AND SERVICES AND FIREARMS BACKGROUND CHECKS
- S.B. No. 386 AN ACT CONCERNING A STUDY OF THE JUVENILE DELINQUENCY LAWS OF THIS STATE
- S.B. No. 16 AN ACT ADDRESSING GUN VIOLENCE AND JUVENILE CRIME.

As someone who has lived and worked in CT for the majority of my life, I have seen first-hand proof, both personally and professionally, that The Juvenile Justice System in Connecticut and The Juvenile Justice and Policy Oversight Committee have successfully and safely reduced the juvenile justice system and expanded diversion and services for youth. The work the committee has done in the state has been recognized and respected as a national model on how to advance best practices in Youth Justice Reform. The legislation I oppose today contains a number of policies that will dismantle the progress we have made in the area of youth justice in Connecticut and seeks to undermine the highly effective Juvenile Justice and Policy Oversight Committee. Legislation derived from the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee is open to discussion and voting by members including state legislators, prosecutors, public defenders, state agencies, judges, police, state advocates, victim advocates, community-based organizations, adults and youth, which is why I support S.B. No. 387 .

The legislation I oppose today is rooted in false claims that Connecticut is experiencing tremendously high rates of crime being committed by youth. This is not supported by data or reports by public safety experts. False narratives of crime and public safety are dangerous, cost lives, and ruin families for generations. This rhetoric is being used to cause fear and push for reforms that, in the end, will result in more black and brown youth and low-income white youth becoming involved in the juvenile justice system. This will not provide a solution for any issues related to crime in our state. As researched and reported by the TOW institute, "despite the headlines, there has been no significant increase in overall juvenile crime in recent years, including motor vehicle thefts. It's important that we understand the true scope of the problem before identifying potential solutions."

Now is the time to invest in issues that really matter to youth – mental health treatment, affordable housing, public education, job training, healthcare, and not to roll back important advances in youth justice through this legislation.

Sincerely, Erin Ortega, 22 Forest Ridge Road, Haddam CT